

# Supervisor Romaine and Councilman Panico Announce Shellfish Seeding and Eelgrass Planting Program with the Moriches Bay Project

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*Pictured left to right are Moriches Bay Project co-founder Aram Terchunian, Supervisor Ed Romaine, Councilman Dan Panico and Moriches Bay Project co-founder Laura Fabrizio.*

**Farmingville, NY** - On July 14, Brookhaven Town Supervisor Ed Romaine, Councilman Dan Panico and Moriches Bay Project co-founders Laura Fabrizio and Aram Terchunian announced a cooperative program for the Town to seed the Moriches Bay with clams and oysters and plant eelgrass. The announcement was made during a press conference held at the Town's Forge River Marina in Mastic. The Supervisor and Councilman committed Town resources to plan and implement a program which will start in the fall of this year.

Oysters and hard-shelled clams provide crucial environmental benefits by filtering algae, which bloom when there is excessive nitrogen and other organic compounds in the water. The removal of these algal blooms increases both the clarity and the overall quality of the water. These shellfish, once matured, also provide shelter for other small organisms which entice larger fish to the area, promoting biodiversity in the bay. Eelgrass has many ecological benefits which include stabilizing seafloor sediments and shorelines, cleaning coastal waters and providing habitat for a diversity of flora and fauna.

Supervisor Romaine said, "This partnership is vital to the preservation of the water quality in the bay. Our waterways have been severely impacted over the years and it is time to take action and clean them up before it's too late. I commend the Moriches Bay Project and our Town Department of Environmental Protection for taking the lead in protecting the bay for generations to come."

Councilman Panico said, "I fully support this new partnership with the Moriches Bay Project because it is in line with the Town's own commitment to improving water quality in Moriches Bay. By working together on initiatives such as oyster farms and eelgrass plantings, we will make a significant impact in transforming the bay back to its original pristine condition."

Moriches Bay Project co-founder Laura Fabrizio said, "The Moriches Bay Project is thrilled to be partnering with Brookhaven Town on an eelgrass planting and oyster seeding project this summer. We are looking forward to this being the start of a very long relationship."

Moriches Bay Project co-founder Aram Terchunian said, "The Moriches Bay Project is pleased to partner with the Town of Brookhaven, Supervisor Ed Romaine, and Councilman Dan Panico in establishing this oyster project that will filter one million gallons of Moriches Bay water every day. Supervisor Romaine's leadership is inspirational and critical in reversing the decline in water quality experienced over the last several decades. We hope that this is the first of many projects."



Following the press conference, staff members from the Town's Department of Environmental Protection (pictured at left) led the press aboard a Town Harbormaster boat to observe an oyster grow-out operation near Osprey Point at the mouth of the Forge River. Two rafts containing more than 16,000 oysters hold twelve bags of oysters. As the animals grow, additional rafts will be added to encourage fast growth. The rafts will be maintained by the Town and the Moriches Bay Project.

The Forge River has a history of water quality issues and is classified as "Impaired Waters" due to the excessive levels of nitrogen entering the river. Nitrogen sources include stormwater discharges, unsewered high density residential development and the river's own sediments, which were deposited during decades of

extensive duck farming that employed minimal waste treatment. Since the Forge River is an impaired waterway, the oysters will be moved to another location to make it easier for the Moriches Bay Project volunteers to monitor the oyster's growth and survival. In the future, the Town's Division of Environmental Protection will increase their overwintering capability of oysters in hopes of providing the Moriches Bay Group with a sufficient number of oysters to keep this effort moving forward.

The Moriches Bay Project™ is an aquatic restoration program created in 2013, by the West Hampton Dunes Barrier Beach Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer organization, and by First Coastal Corporation, a coastal environmental consulting firm based out of Westhampton Beach. As a mission to improve overall water quality in Moriches Bay, and increase its environmental productivity, the Moriches Bay Project is dedicated to

re-establishing populations of shellfish and eelgrass to this fragile marine environment. Through stewardship, partnership, and community awareness, the Moriches Bay Project hopes to make long-term improvements to the bay and empower the community with knowledge to counteract local environmental problems. To learn more, go to [www.morichesbayproject.org](http://www.morichesbayproject.org).

Since the 1990's, the Town of Brookhaven has been running a hard clam and oyster nursery program at its Mariculture Facility located in Mt. Sinai Harbor. As part of the Town's partnership program with the several not-for-profit organizations it teams with, the Town provides shellfish rafts and cages, anchoring supplies and the shellfish to stock the rafts. The Town also provides personnel and machinery to assist in the installation and removal of the rafts and periodic maintenance.

**Division of Public Information \* Office of the Supervisor**

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